

NORDIC - BALTIC MEETING IN REYKJAVIK, ICELAND

3TH - 4TH APRIL 2014 - FINLAND

Liberal (non-formal) adult education in Finland 31.3.2014

Policy, actions, economy and feelings

The institutions (five types of them) are functioning very well. We still have over 300 institutions all over the country, although the amount of municipal adult education centers (medborgarinstitutet) has shrunk during the last years. Municipalities have merged small adult education centers into bigger, more regional institutions. About one million learners are studying every year in liberal adult education institutions.

If we look at the numbers and activities, the situation seems to be good. The clouds come from the direction of the state and policy makers who make austere decisions because Finland's economic situation is not good. The public debt has increased heavily every year and the government has to find measures to balance the economy. Money and structures are discussed now, not education, pedagogy or bildningsfrågor – unfortunately.

Economy

The state has slashed the financing of liberal adult education during the last years, especially the year 2011 and now. The government decided in the end of March that the liberal adult education sector has to spare 20 per cent of its state and municipal support. We have a doubt that it will come more austerity measures in the future. The situation seems very bad.

All liberal adult education institutions have a tough economic situation, and it is worsening. For example many folk high schools are discussing lay offs, dismissals and selling of buildings.

Structure

The Ministry of Education has settled a work group, the aim of which is to analyze and make proposals for a new structure for liberal adult education institutions. The government has made a clear guideline: bigger units for liberal adult education. We have to plan now how we can create these. It is a quite a tough mission because it seems impossible to combine institutions that are based on different values and have different backgrounds, histories, aims and tasks. There is a big boom in Finland: big is beautiful. According to the guideline, the sector also has to limit the amount of courses. The state wants to put a roof for the amount of produced hours or weeks, although there is demand for more, as people want to study and learn in institutions.

Financing system

The work groups another big issue is the financing system of liberal adult education institutions. There are some questions or problems that have to put in order. For example study centers have to decide how they modernize study circles. They are nowadays old fashioned and not attractive enough. Adult education centers are discussing if there should be one or two rates for the hour. Now the state support for learning hour is lower in rural areas than in big cities. Folk high schools have many questions which need to be analyzed: basic funding, week rate, investment support and so on. A shared concern is the regulation and financing of learning combining different environments, methods, media, and instructor-student positions.

Compulsory education or obligatory learning duty (not school duty)

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The government decided last fall to lengthen the time of compulsory education by one year. It ends at the age of 17, starting from the next year. We have pointed out that the folk high schools offer an excellent opportunity for a young person to finalize his or her compulsory education. We are waiting for the decisions from the part of the government.

Youth guarantee

The government has promised the young people that they all have a student place, a work place, or a work practice place after finishing the comprehensive school. Folk high schools offer learning places for those young people who don't go to gymnasium or vocational education. We have told the government that there is no need for new organizations or institutes or structures in order to take care of the young people who have problems in finding a place after comprehensive school. The liberal adult education sector already has ready facilities and a financial structure. What is needed for organizing this kind of schooling and training is an extra financing and a support. The definite decisions have not yet been made.

Research on liberal adult education

The FRPAE (Freedom and Responsibility of Popular Adult Education)-program unites in cooperation three Finnish universities and the national associations of liberal adult education in order to strengthen the research of the field. A professor of each university leads a group of undergraduate and doctoral students who have chosen liberal adult education as an object of study. FAEA organizes national meetings and seminars for the network, and supports the interaction between scholars and practitioners. The first publication from the program will be released in the end of this year. FAEA also participates in organizing the next Nordic conference of adult education and learning in 2015 in Tampere (<http://www.peda.net/veraja/vsy/nordic2015>).

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